

# The State of Cypriot Minorities: Cultural Diversity, Internal-Exclusion and the Cyprus 'Problem'<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This essay argues that Cypriot national minorities suffer from 'internal-exclusion' because the clash of foreign nationalisms (Greek and Turkish) and imperialisms (British, American, Greek and Turkish) in Cyprus has resulted in the domination of the 'Greeks' and 'Turks' despite the historical presence of other communities. This has also resulted in the failure to develop an indigenous Cypriot identity, one that crosses religious difference and has as its base the idea of Cyprus as a secular homeland that includes all its disparate national groups who call themselves 'Cypriots'. Not only have both Greek and Turkish Cypriot elite, by focusing on their inter-communal problem, practised assimilation into the majority of the minority since the independence of the island from British rule in 1960, but the institutional structures from which assimilation could be implemented were imbedded into the Constitution. In the Constitution the national minorities<sup>2</sup> were termed 'religious groups' and forced to become members of either dominant community. Thus, by being denied their place as 'national' minorities and regarded as religious sub-groups of one of the two dominant communities, they have suffered 'internal-exclusion'. This has had adverse effects on their rights as well as their position in Cypriot society.*

**Keywords:** Cyprus, historical diversity, national minorities, Cyprus Problem, multiculturalism, identity

## Introduction

Cyprus has been religiously and culturally diverse since at least medieval times – multi-religious, even multi-cultural.<sup>3</sup> Greeks, Turks, Maronites, Armenians, Latins, Orthodox Christians,

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1 This essay was presented at the *Tenth International Conference on Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, 19 to 21 July 2010 with the title 'Cultural Diversity in Cyprus: National Minorities as an Internal-Exclusion'.

2 I mean 'national' in the context of homeland; rather than 'ethnic', which in my view is one way of distinguishing national identities, but by no means the exclusive way, as the national minorities of Cyprus were actually distinguished by their religion.

3 Without its contemporary connotations relating to diasporic communities in multicultural societies such as those in Australia and Canada.

Muslims, Catholic Christians, Jews, Gypsies, Lino-bambaki, and others, including Cypriots, exist with distinct identities during modern times, although religious, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, civil and other types of labels confuse and confound the scholar. Through integration and assimilation, but primarily through the development of ethnic national identities, a rigid ethnic national identification and separation has evolved into Greeks, Turks, Maronites, Armenians, Latins, Gypsies, which is only challenged by those who believe themselves to be Cypriots and by those who cross the inter-religious boundaries of Christian and Muslim, such as the Lino-bambaki and those who inter-marry, or the intra-religious Christian boundaries, again through inter-marriage. Because of the encouragement of Greek and Turkish ethnic nationalism during the British period, replacing the primarily religious and regional identities,<sup>4</sup> the two main demographically represented inhabitants, the Eastern Orthodox Christian Cypriots and the Muslim Cypriots, became 'Greeks' and 'Turks' respectively. And because this was inspired by foreign (European Enlightenment views on ancient and modern Greece) identity constructs (that is, a past and language largely alien to the island) and within the context of the Greco-Ottoman/Turkish conflict – again largely alien to the island<sup>5</sup> – two distinct political demands evolved within the elite of both Cypriot communities, which not only were mutually exclusive of each other but excluded the national minorities of the island. The increasing political modernisation of Greek and Turkish Cypriot elites, especially in terms of nationalism, resulted in Greek Cypriot nationalists organising a terrorist organisation to challenge British rule in favour of union of the island to Greece, or *enosis*.<sup>6</sup> This development along with British and Turkish government encouragement incited the Turkish Cypriot elite to organise their own terrorist group. The resulting clash compelled all parties to reluctantly agree to a compromise, accepting to share power in an independent republic in

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4 A. Varnava (2009) *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915: The Inconsequential Possession*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 152-201.

5 For various examples and explanations see, *ibid.*, pp. 152-201.

6 My position on 'terrorism' broadly agrees with that of Alex P. Schmid: 'Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought'. A.P. Schmid and A.J. Jongman *et al* (1988) *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Group. In my view, the 'Cyprus Emergency' reveals group based terrorism from EOKA and TMT, as well as state terror from the British. That EOKA was running an 'anti-colonial' struggle or that TMT was a 'defence organisation' – claims which are both debateable – are unrelated to the label 'terrorism' because the term itself does not take into account the aims of the political violence itself.

exchange for the termination of British rule. The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was born in 1960, recognising two communities, the Greek and the Turkish, and three 'Religious Groups', the Maronite, Armenian and the Latin. According to the first census taken in 1960, the Armenian Cypriots number just over 3,600, the Maronite Cypriots just over 2,700 and the Latin Cypriots over 4,000; now the estimates differ with the Maronite in the majority.<sup>7</sup> The island's minorities were not only entirely excluded from the process but compelled to choose to belong to one of the two main and constitutionally equal communities. Nationalist discourses suppressed Cyprus' cultural diversity, militarised society and excluded national minorities.

### Cultural Diversity and Historiography

Cyprus, recent scholarship has shown, is a religiously and culturally diverse place since the medieval period and since the Ottoman period various historical minorities (mainly Christian, but also Muslim) have been largely excluded and pressured to assimilate into the 'Greek' Cypriot community, thus suffering internal exclusion (during Ottoman rule there were sometimes pressures on Christians to assimilate into the Muslim community).

*Cyprus: Society and Culture, 1191-1374* totally revises the pre-existing fallacies that the rule of the Catholic Frankish Lusignan dynasty, from the late twelfth to the fifteenth century, was oppressive for the majority of the population, which was Eastern Orthodox Christian. The book provides ample evidence of a religiously and culturally diverse cosmopolitan Cyprus.<sup>8</sup> Under the Lusignans, the Catholic Church and nobility allowed the Eastern Orthodox Church to function, albeit subordinated to Rome.<sup>9</sup> Only one serious incident resulted from a clash between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the island, particularly Famagusta, was extraordinarily diverse, with 'Romice (Romans)' or 'Greeks' (Greeks to the Franks, Romice to themselves), Nestorians, Armenians, Maronites, Jacobites, Georgians, Copts, Melkites, Nubians, Indians, Ethiopians, Jews, Arabs, Turks and Egyptians, the last three often Christian converts, as well as western Europeans.<sup>11</sup> Economically the island prospered becoming (from the second half of the thirteenth century) an 'entrepot in the carrying trade between Western Europe and the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East'.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, economic growth

7 A. Varnava (2009) 'The Minorities of Cyprus in the *History of Cyprus* Textbook for Lyceum Students', in Varnava, A., Coureas, N. and Elia, M. (eds.), *The Minorities of Cyprus*, p. 303.

8 A. Nicolaou-Konnari and C. Schabel (eds.) (2005) *Cyprus – Society and Culture 1191-1374*, Leiden: Brill.

9 N. Coureas (1997) *The Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195-1312*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

10 Schabel, C. (2005) 'Religion' in A. Nicolaou-Konnari and C. Schabel (eds.), *Cyprus – Society and Culture 1191-1374*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 157-218; Schabel, C. (2010) 'Martyrs and Heretics, Intolerance of Intolerance: The Execution of Thirteen Monks in Cyprus in 1231', *Greeks, Latins and the Church in Early Frankish Cyprus*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 1-33.

11 *Ibid*; C.F. Beckingham (1957) 'Islam and Turkish Nationalism in Cyprus', *Die Welt des Islams*, pp. 65-83.

12 N. Coureas (2005) 'Economy' in Nicolaou-Konnari and Schabel (eds.), *Cyprus ...*, pp. 103-156.

and prosperity, coupled with the cosmopolitan society, broke the rigid social hierarchy that the Lusignans imposed producing 'Kypriotes', a political, cultural (including linguistic) and regional (not ethnic as Nicolaou-Konnari argues) identity.<sup>13</sup> This state of affairs continued until the end of Latin rule (the Venetians replaced the Lusignans in the fifteenth century).

This integrated society changed under Ottoman and British rule. The Ottoman millet system had integrationist – even assimilationist structures. Cyprus' religiously diverse yet relatively homogenous inhabitants were divided along religious lines, with emphasis now on the elevated Eastern Orthodox Church and its role in governance with the Muslim administrative and military elite. Despite recent publications on Ottoman Cyprus,<sup>14</sup> the least is known about the minorities during Ottoman rule. What happened to the Jacobites, Georgians, Copts, Melkites, Nubians, Indians, Ethiopians? Did they migrate, or integrate, or had they been integrated earlier and therefore the distinctions no longer applied? The first British census of 1881 found that aside from Eastern Orthodox Christians and Muslims there were Maronite, Roman Catholic and Armenian Christians. The British helped create the space from which the previous religious identity of the inhabitants could develop into an ethnic national identity by applying their own ideas of ethnicity and race, which were informed by one aspect of the island's past – its Hellenic – thus allowing for the local elite to become Greeks and Turks respectively.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the previous religious identity, ethnic national identity divided Cypriot society, especially because the two main communities had 'motherlands' to whom they looked to, and in the Greek case, demanded to unite with. This alienated the Muslim Cypriots, as well as the Christian minorities, who felt threatened by the possibility of Greek rule.<sup>16</sup>

Little has been published on the three national minorities that 'survived' Ottoman rule, let alone on minorities such as the Jews,<sup>17</sup> 'Lino-bambaki'<sup>18</sup> – publicly Muslim, but privately Christian – and Arabs (counted in some British censuses as Muslims and subsequently considered as Turks, or as Armenians in the case of the Copts). In English there are two books and five articles to consider. Susan Pattie's ethnographic/anthropological study explores the relationship between religion and nationalism for Cypriot Armenians, showing how nation and homeland

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13 Nicolaou-Konnari, 'Greeks', *ibid.*, pp. 13-62.

14 M. Michael, M. Kappler and G. Eftihios (eds.) (2009) *Ottoman Cyprus: New Perspectives*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

15 Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus ...*, pp. 152-201.

16 G.S. Georghallides (1979) *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918-1926*, Nicosia, pp. 353-354.

17 Unfortunately very little has been written on the Jews. Stavros Panteli's account, despite being informative and makes use of extensive archival research, lacks the wider imperial context, as well as colonial dynamics as played out in Cyprus. S. Panteli (2003) *Place of Refuge: A History of the Jews in Cyprus*, London: Elliott and Thompson.

18 The most interesting article on the Lino-Bambaki was that written by Roland Michell, District Commissioner of Limassol, 1879-1911. R.L.N. Michell (1908) 'A Muslim-Christian Sect in Cyprus', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. LXIII (May), pp. 751-762.

evolve in a space where a conflict between two larger communities predominates.<sup>19</sup> Caesar Mavratsas then published two articles: one on Armenian identity within the context of Greek nationalism; and the other a comparison of Armenian and Maronite Cypriot assimilation into the dominant Greek Cypriot society.<sup>20</sup> Mavratsas' main argument is that Greek Cypriot ethno-nationalism encourages Armenian ethno-nationalism and therefore distinctiveness from Greek Cypriot society, whereas this is not the case for Maronites, who are progressively assimilated into Greek Cypriot society. Although Mavratsas offers various reasons as to why this might be the case, the main reason in his view is the Armenian communities' sense of belonging to a wider Armenian Diaspora, whereas for the Maronite Cypriots, their belonging to a wider Maronite Diaspora is more symbolic than practical and their identity is centred on Cyprus. Mavratsas provides some interesting observations to account for this, but one reason he does not mention is the fact that the connection of Armenian Cypriots with Cyprus begins with their survival of the Armenian Genocide, while the Maronite Cypriots date back to the Medieval period and so have a much longer and more deeply rooted connection to Cyprus. Subsequently, two articles appeared, one on the Maronites and the other on the Latins, in 2002 and 2005 respectively. The article on the Cypriot Maronites uses western sources to show that the Maronites were numerous during the Latin period, but reduced in size during the Ottoman period. Their presence stabilised under British rule as they grew in importance in public life. The British tried to manipulate them against the Greeks in the inter-war years when the British finally decided to tackle the Greek Cypriot elite's *enosis* demand.<sup>21</sup> The Maronites opposed *enosis*, along with the Armenians, Latins and Turkish Cypriots, fearing Greek domination.<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Coureas' article on the Latin community demonstrates that the presence and profile of the Roman Catholics in Cyprus – the 'Latins' (mostly Venetians) – was reduced under the Ottoman millet system, but not entirely eradicated, as religious representatives and services continued, as did the movement of Roman Catholics to (and from) the island. Consequently, the current Latin community evolved from the Ottoman period. During British rule, the Latins further evolved, like the Armenians and Maronites, into a distinct group, but not along ethno-nationalist lines: rather, composed of French, Venetian, Ragusan, Italian, Maltese, and Spanish, along religious national lines.<sup>23</sup> Costas Constantinou's

19 S.P. Pattie (1997) *Faith in History: Armenians Rebuilding Community*, Washington/London: Smithsonian Institute Press.

20 C. Mavratsas (2000) 'Armenian Identity and Greek Nationalism in Cyprus', *Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 197-205; C. Mavratsas (2003) 'The Armenians and the Maronites of Cyprus: Comparative Considerations Concerning Ethnic Assimilation', *Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen*, Vol. XXXVII, pp. 205-210.

21 See A. Varnava (2002) 'The Maronite Community of Cyprus: Past, Present and Future', *Al-Mashriq: A Quarterly Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. I, No. 2 (September), pp. 45-70, 48.

22 *Ibid.*

23 N. Coureas (2005) 'The Historical Development of Cyprus' Present-Day Latin Community', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. XV, No. 1, pp. 149-166.

more analytical article of 2007 focuses on identity politics and the hybrid nature of Cyprus' society. Constantinou went beyond the 'known' minorities to discuss Gypsies and Lino-bambaki. The latter is particularly interesting since Constantinou shows that Lino-bambaki were not simply crypto-Christians, but a cross-religious and cross-ethnic community, with different rationales, circumstances and development depending on their origins and location. Nevertheless, because of bicomunalism, they have virtually disappeared and remained largely misunderstood. Bicomunalism, Constantinou points out, was a product of the British modernising of the Ottoman millet system – that is, nationalising the religious classification of the millet system. This contributed to the creation of 'Greeks' and 'Turks', and the Cyprus Problem, and also excluded other minorities and identifying labels, whether ethnic, religious or otherwise, such as Maronites, Armenians (mostly belonging to the Apostolic Church, but also the Catholic and Anglican churches), Latins, Christian and Muslim Gypsies, Jews, Old Calendar Worshipers, Jehovah's Witnesses, Babis (Azalis), Baha'is, and various heterodox Muslim groups, such as the Bektashis.<sup>24</sup>

Lastly, in 2009, the first book on the minorities of Cyprus appeared, based on the conference 'Minorities of Cyprus: Past, Present and Future' held at the European University – Cyprus on 24 and 25 November 2007.<sup>25</sup> After lectures and a symposium in September and earlier in November 2007 dealing with minority rights and especially the Maronite Cypriot communities struggle to protect, promote and have recognised their distinct Cypriot Maronite Arabic (CMA), the 'Minorities of Cyprus' conference broadly dealt with the past, present and future of the three minorities recognised as religious groups in the 1960 Constitution (with presentations also on the Roma and the Anglicans). The historical context of these communities and of the island, which have been separated in nationalist narratives of Cyprus' past, came together. For the Maronites, the knowledge that they do not originate from the Lebanon or Syria, was a new development. They had to come to terms with the reduction to their numbers during Ottoman rule and the lack of knowledge to answer for this. Also they had to come to terms with the domination of the Cypriot Orthodox Church during Ottoman rule, their opposition to union with Greece, and the requirement of them to choose to belong to a community in 1960, the Greek or the Turkish, when they did not want to belong to either. For the Armenians, they had to confront the evidence that their historical presence on the island has fluctuated without sources to account for this. They had to deal with the evidence that Armenians participated in the Ottoman invasion of Cyprus in 1570.<sup>26</sup> Armenians must also deal with the fact that some of their community evolved out of the

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24 C. Constantinou (2007) 'Aporias of Identity: Bicomunalism, Hybridity and the "Cyprus Problem"', *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. XLII, pp. 247-270.

25 A. Varnava, N. Coureas and M. Elia (eds.) (2009) *The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

26 A. An (2009) 'The Cypriot Armenian Minority and their Cultural Relationship with the Turkish Cypriots' in Varnava, Coureas and Elia (eds.), *The Minorities of Cyprus...*, pp. 283-284.

1915 Ottoman genocide and that it is difficult to determine the continued presence of earlier members of the community.<sup>27</sup> For the Armenians, choosing to belong to the Greek community was not as traumatic as it was for the Maronites due to the Ottoman Genocide of Armenians as many Armenians lived near the 'Turkish' quarter in Nicosia and Larnaca and spoke Turkish rather than Greek or Armenian.<sup>28</sup> For the Latin Christians, their presence is the result of various settlements before, during and even after Ottoman rule. One significant difference is that they are clearly a religious rather than an ethnic and/or religious national community, so they have the problem of not being as homogenous as the Maronite and Armenian communities. More specifically, at the last session of the conference, a round table discussion included the leaders of the three communities (Latins, Armenians and Maronites), Professor Constantinou, and a lively audience, who addressed the numerous problems that the minorities faced either individually or collectively.

### **National Minority Issues and Policy Changes**

At the conference various issues confronting the minorities were raised and debated. It is difficult to understand the issues of communities which are not organised, such as the Roma and migrant workers. Migrant workers are well represented by the NGO Κίνηση για Ισότητα, Στήριξη, Ανυπατοισμό (Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism) or KISA, which has been unjustifiably maligned in both the media and some political circles, namely the nationalist parties, DIKO, EDEK and EVROKO. The Roma rely on local activists. As for the officially designated 'religious groups', the Maronites, Armenians and Latins, have representation in the House of Representatives, and they have formed community groups and NGOs (especially so for the Maronites and Armenians, who have traditionally been organised around various associations and clubs, and more recently pressure groups).

The national minorities have been the victims of the Cyprus Problem in many different ways from the protagonists of that problem, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Exclusion, institutional assimilation, cultural and linguistic neglect, and, like Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots they have been victims of violence and displacement. The official designation 'religious groups' was perhaps because ethnic national identity did not apply to Cyprus (beyond a handful of elites) during Ottoman rule, developing after a period of decades when British policy, institutions, Greek nationals, and Hellenised Cypriots spread Hellenic identity to the island, to which Muslim elites, influenced by Ataturk's reforms, reacted in kind to advocate Turkish national identity.<sup>29</sup> Another reason for the 'religious' identification being applied to the national minorities was perhaps the

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27 Varnava (2009) 'The Minorities of Cyprus in the *History of Cyprus* Textbook for Lyceum Students', pp. 310-311.

28 An, 'The Cypriot Armenian Minority...', 288-289.

29 Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus ...*, pp. 152-201; A. Nevzat (2005) *Nationalism amongst the Turks of Cyprus*, Oulu.

unwillingness of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot elites to recognise any other ethnic national identities. To them, Cyprus is an island of Greeks and Turks and the Cyprus Problem is between Greeks and Turks. This notion was institutionalised when the constitution compelled the three 'religious groups' (Armenians, Maronites and Latins) to hold a vote on which community they wished to belong. This satisfied the bi-communal institutional structures of the state so as to facilitate electoral, tax and other responsibilities, but it has also had unintentional consequences which have been propelled too by the Cyprus Problem, namely the assimilation of the minorities into the Greek community (which they 'chose' to 'belong') as a subgroup of that community.<sup>30</sup>

It was not only Cyprus' constitutional framework which disempowered the national minorities, but also the actions of both the Greek and Turkish communities in trying to destroy the republic, culminating in the 1963-1964 civil war, which produced inter-communal violence and massacres. The three national minorities all suffered displacement, particularly Cypriot Armenians who fled their quarter of Old Nicosia in 1964, and Cypriot Maronites who fled their villages after the Turkish army intervention in 1974. But the impact has not simply been in terms of casualties and displacement.

The three 'religious groups' are of course 'represented' in Parliament. These representatives initially belonged to the Communal Chamber established as part of the 1960 Constitution. But the Constitution collapsed when the Greek Cypriot elite set up the Akritas Organisation (and several other paramilitary groups in the wake of the splintering of EOKA after 1960), which aimed to remove – through diplomacy or violence – the rights of Turkish Cypriots as an equal community.<sup>31</sup> This played into the Turkish Cypriot elite's aims of partition, and consequently, after Akritas' false-flag operations, clashes erupted in December 1963, resulting in massacres and violence into the middle of 1964, and necessitating the deployment of a UN Peacekeeping Force (UNFICYP).<sup>32</sup> The result was that the Turkish Cypriots were able to justify their removal from the organs of the state, but failed to prevent the international community from recognising the Greek Cypriot leadership as the legitimate government of the Republic of Cyprus. With the Turkish Cypriots out, the Greek Cypriot elite changed the state's functioning. These changes not only cemented the exclusion of Turkish Cypriots, but further excluded the national minorities ('religious groups'), all of whom had voted to belong to the Greek community. The Communal Chamber was dissolved and its Greek Cypriot deputies were integrated into an enlarged House of

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30 In a referendum held on 14 November 1960, 1,077 Armenians, 1,046 Maronites, and 322 Latin-Catholics voted to 'belong' to the Greek community, with only five Armenians and one Roman Catholic voting in favour of adhering to the Turkish community. A. Emilianides (2009) 'The Legal Status of the Latin Community' in Varnava, Coureas and Elia (eds.), *The Minorities of Cyprus*, p. 230.

31 R. Patrick (1976) *Political Geography and the Cyprus Conflict: 1963-1971*, Ontario: University of Waterloo; M. Drousiotis (2006) *The First Partition*, Nicosia: Alphadi.

32 *Ibid.*



Representatives with full powers. The three representatives of the 'religious groups' joined them, but without the same rights, only with 'observer' status. This obvious discrimination continues until this day, thus reflecting the Greek Cypriot elite's ingrained Greek ethnic nationalism and exclusion of other communities.

Societal exclusion and discrimination is one of the major grievances of leaders of the Maronite, Armenian and Latin communities in Cyprus. Not only are various policies and laws enacted and funds allocated in the House of Representatives which impact upon the national minorities as they do Greek Cypriots, but there are those policies and laws that only affect national minorities. Their representatives have no way of formally influencing these votes, but rather are forced to rely on Greek-Cypriot representatives contacting them for information and their views before voting. In education, the national minorities are virtually excluded from the curriculum bar a meagre mention at the very end of the *History of Cyprus* textbook for lyceum students. This section, if the students are taught it, isolates the national minorities from the main ethno-nationalist narrative the students are taught.<sup>33</sup> Is it any wonder that during the conference many members of all three communities, but especially those of the Latin and Maronite communities (because the Armenians, with their Armenian names, are more visible), expressed their disgust at how Greek Cypriot friends did not even know that Cyprus society included Maronite and Latin Christians, nor even who they were?<sup>34</sup>

For Cypriot Maronites, the RoC government's refusal to recognise CMA, spoken by villagers from Kormakitis, was considered both insulting and a reflection of the government's nationalist, exclusionist and discriminatory approach to non-'Greek' Cypriot Christians. Cypriot Maronites saw the injustice as part of a policy of assimilation into the Greek Cypriot community and a denial of their cultural and linguistic heritage. When the Council of Europe had first raised the issue of recognising the language, Papadopoulos' government denied its existence. Then, when a Council of Europe 'committee of experts' strongly urged reconsideration, the government countered with the erroneous claim that only a handful of elderly Maronites living in 'Turkish occupied northern Cyprus' spoke it and so they were beyond government control. Whether the RoC has access to the speakers is irrelevant; but in any event displaced Kormakiti community members speak CMA across the island. Scholars led by Alexander Borg devised an alphabet for CMA based on the Latin script and it was introduced in December 2007. The language is taught to Maronite Cypriots, no thanks, however, to the Papadopoulos government, which refused to allow its teaching during school hours at the Maronite state school (St Maron in Lakatamia, Nicosia), insisting that only the official state languages, Greek and Turkish, can be taught (although Turkish is not taught and

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33 Varnava, 'The Minorities of Cyprus in the *History of Cyprus* Textbook ...', pp. 299-313.

34 There is no empirical data to support the claims of the communities beyond their stories shared during the question, comment and answer sessions of the conference.

English is). Those pupils wishing to learn the language must attend lessons after hours. To the credit of the students and their instructors, by the end of 2009, they were performing plays in CMA.<sup>35</sup> Currently, the Ministry of Education and Culture is considering permitting the teaching of CMA as part of the curriculum at St Maron.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the interest of the academic community and community groups, and the election of a pro-reunification president in February 2008, many of the issues of the national minorities have not been adequately addressed. As has been the case in the past, issues other than the Cyprus Problem are relegated to the back of the filing cabinet or even the dustbin. One issue, after much pushing from the Maronite Cypriot community and academics, was however satisfactorily resolved, when in November 2008 Christofias' government recognised CMA as a Minority Language within the meaning of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. As Constantinou stated in his CMA Policy brief this decision signified a complete reversal with the Papadopoulos government's discriminatory policy.<sup>37</sup>

CMA's recognition reflected the cultural sensitivity of the Minister of the Interior, Neoclis Sylikiotis, and of the Minister of Education, Andreas Demetriou. In March 2008, at a seminar on immigration and those seeking asylum at the European University – Cyprus, Sylikiotis declared that 'Cyprus was and always will be multicultural because of its geographical position', and that 'Cypriots must change their perception of diversity' and 'understand that "different" people enrich a society'.<sup>38</sup> Demetriou, a Professor in Psychology, soon announced that the government intended to revise the history textbooks, making them more inclusive and that the 2008-2009 school year would have the theme 'reconciliation'.<sup>39</sup> Such views and policy initiatives met with vociferous disapproval from the nationalist parties closely aligned with the Church, namely DIKO and EDEK, despite these parties belonging to the coalition government. In the end, few policies have been implemented to alleviate the formal and informal exclusion and discrimination of members of the national minorities, owing to the focus on the reunification of the island via the direct bi-communal talks (between Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot leaders).

## Epilogue

The talks have generated some anxiety for the national minorities; largely because of the previous blue print for the 'comprehensive solution to the Cyprus Problem', which Greek Cypriots voted down in a referendum in April 2004, but which Turkish Cypriots approved. There are a number

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35 *Koinotiko Vima* [Community Step], No. 63, December 2009, p. 23; *Ibid.*, No. 64, December 2009, p. 23.

36 Correspondence with the secretary of the Cypriot Maronite Parliamentary representative, 11 and 20 January 2010.

37 C. Constantinou (2009) 'The Protection and Revival of Cypriot Maronite Arabic', PRIO Cyprus Centre, Policy Brief, January.

38 *Cyprus Mail*, 22 March 2008, internet edition.

39 *Ibid.*, 6 July 2008; *Ibid.*, 29 July 2008.

of significant points regarding the national minorities of Cyprus and the five versions of the so-called Annan Plan: 1) in earlier versions, the national minorities were referred to as 'religious and other minorities', but because Greek and/or Turkish Cypriot elites did not like the reference to 'other minorities' this was removed;<sup>40</sup> 2) the rights of these 'religious minorities', given as Maronite, Latin and Armenian (in version three Gypsies were mentioned – see point below), were enshrined in the 'fundamental rights and liberties' article of the constitution, and were to be safeguarded according to 'international standards' (subsequently clarified in Article 11 where reference is made to the 'European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities') and would encompass cultural, religious, and educational rights, as well as representation in federal and constituent state parliaments; 3) in version four of the Annan Plan, the Roma were included as 'religious minorities', but in version five they were 'removed', no doubt, as Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou have claimed, because of Greek and/or Turkish Cypriot elite objections;<sup>41</sup> 4) the inclusion of the Cypriot Maronite villages in the Greek Cypriot constituent state.

The last point has created some ripples amongst Cypriot Maronites and their advocates. Reacting to hearsay that in a reunified Cyprus the Maronite villages in northern Cyprus today would be in the Turkish Cypriot constituent state, Alkan Chaglar, a postgraduate student at the School of Oriental and African Studies, condemned Christofias. He claimed that the Maronite villages should form a third federal zone, to encourage integration and potentially lead to a 'Cypriotist' federal zone(s). Ironically, however, Chaglar's view is also separatist, potentially further enshrining differences rather than commonalities through ethnically separate constituent states.<sup>42</sup> Yet he raises important questions. How in a reunified Cyprus can the Maronite villages be best protected from assimilation? Should a reunified Cyprus promote a Cypriot identity? If so, why and how?

The first three points relate to the unwillingness of Greek and Turkish Cypriot elite to recognise the national minorities of Cyprus as 'national' or even as 'ethnic' minorities instead of religious 'groups' or simply 'minorities'. The word 'national' as opposed to 'religious' or 'ethnic' is important for various reasons: 'national' reflects historical longevity on the island and a shared past; it goes beyond religion (and race and ethnicity) as the basis of identification, recognising linguistic, cultural and social differences, as well as commonalities; it goes further, beyond ethnic national identity because of the civic responsibility of each citizen to the Cypriot state; but, most importantly, because 'national minorities' is used internationally and in the European Framework

40 I am basing this claim on the fact that Greek and Turkish Cypriot elites did not like the reference to Roma as a 'religious group'. N. Trimikliniotis and C. Demetriou (2009) 'The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education' in Varnava, Coureas and Elia (eds.), *The Minorities of Cyprus*, p. 243, fn. 12.

41 *Ibid.* Constantinou, 'Aporias of Identity ...', pp. 249-250, 264.

42 *Cyprus Mail*, 9 May 2009.

Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. For various reasons, but especially legal, appropriate legal terminology and labels affects groups and individuals. There is also an unwillingness to recognise the Roma as a national minority in the Constitution, reflecting how prejudices cross communal boundaries (although, as a first step, Christofias' government has implicitly recognised the Roma in its 2009 Report to the Council of Europe).<sup>43</sup>

More broadly, this unwillingness to recognise national minorities goes to the very heart of the Cyprus Problem and to reunification. Moving beyond simply 'Greek community of Cyprus' and 'Turkish community of Cyprus' is important in order to recognise the diversity and multiple identities that exist, even a Cypriot identity. How can Cypriots retain their national identities, determined by cultural, religious and linguistic differences, while also coming closer together as Cypriots through understanding their shared past, social, cultural and even linguistic similarities, and through a civil identity that requires a responsibility and loyalty to the federal Cypriot state? Although the bi-zonal and bi-communal nature of any new Cypriot state does not automatically lend itself to encourage a Cypriot identity, institutional mechanisms, such as cross-voting, an inclusive education system, and emphasis on secularisation, would go some way in encouraging the recognition and thus benefits of Cypriot diversity.

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